The Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency (MCCD) is celebrating its 60th year of promoting state justice policies that are fair, effective and affordable.

Since it was established in 1956, MCCD has been a trailblazer in Michigan, partnering with communities on crime prevention strategies, promoting fair and equitable access to justice, expanding community-based alternatives to incarceration, and improving outcomes through safe and effective treatment.

Over the next few months we are commemorating MCCD’s 60 years of service by showcasing its legacy of accomplishments throughout the decades. These briefs will lead up to MCCD’s 60th Anniversary Gala in September—we hope to see you there!

**The First 10 Years: 1956 - 1966**

The Michigan Crime and Delinquency Council, later changed to “Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency,” was initially created in response to the turmoil of the 1952 Jackson Prison riots, when over 2,600 inmates rebelled against poor, crowded, and inhumane conditions. As a result of the $2.5 million in damages caused by the riots, many Michigan citizens realized drastic measures were needed to reform our state prison system.

The National Parole and Probation Association, following receipt of a grant from the Ford Foundation, organized the Michigan Crime and Delinquency Council in late 1955. The Council elected Byron J. Nichols, VP of Chrysler Motors, as its board chair.
The National Parole and Probation Association’s charge was to:

1. Examine and evaluate how the state handles offenders, from first contact to disposition and treatment
2. Recommend and prioritize innovations and improvements
3. Keep the public informed
4. Advocate for public/private solutions

In May 1960, John B. Martin, a “citizen and a taxpayer” and member of the Council, wrote about the state of Michigan’s prisons, with a “high average of 122 persons in the state prisons for every 100,000 population” (compared to today’s 344 per 100,000 whites and 2,169 per 100,000 blacks). He lamented the prison incarceration cost of “at least $1,200 per year” (compared to $35,000 per year in 2015).

Martin reported that the State was considering a capital outlay $16.5 million dollar for new prison beds. Austin MacCormick, a distinguished University of California-Berkley criminologist and prison reformer, was asked to conduct a comprehensive investigation of the Jackson Prison riots. MacCormick’s “almost buried” recommendation was that the National Parole and Probation Association “…determine to what extent probation services could be safely increased, thus helping reduce prison population…”¹. Martin determined that for the same $10,000 – $15,000 needed to construct a new prison cell, the state could dramatically expand probation and parole services at $250 per person, per year. Probation and parole services were grossly understaffed with some caseloads exceeding 600 cases. Martin states, “[t]he degree of understaffing in some counties is so high that probation services is nonexistent.”¹
The Saginaw Project

In early 1956, the Council planned a demonstration project with help from the Michigan Department of Corrections and the University of Michigan, and funded by the McGregor Fund. The project’s goal was to show that well-staffed and competently trained and supervised probation departments could handle 70-75% of the circuit court convictions with the same or better results and at a significant cost savings. The pilot in Saginaw County began in July 1957. In just 3 years it reduced the prison commitment rate by half, reduced probation violation commitments by 47%, and brought about, according to Martin “bold and imaginative actions which the magnitude of the problem demands and which governmental officials alone cannot achieve.”¹

By 1960, The Michigan Council had worked with the Michigan Department of Corrections to “expand probation and parole staffs and to encourage the application of sound and tested techniques.” The average probation caseload was reduced to 120, and parole caseloads, to 100.¹

1957: The Council Initiates Juvenile Justice Advocacy in Michigan

Shortly after the Saginaw Project was launched, the first ever comprehensive review of children’s services in the Michigan Probate Courts was completed under the auspices of the Michigan Crime and Delinquency Council. The review found that although Michigan Probate Judges were trying to increase quality of care, with efforts to expand staff capacity and competency, a majority of counties remained understaffed and inadequately trained, especially in the smaller counties. Children were receiving inferior care to adults on probation.

Nationally, delinquency cases increased 100% in less than 10 years, with a similar trajectory in Michigan. Neglect complaints in the state increased 32% from 1950-1955.¹
The study determined there were no statewide personnel standards governing county agents or probation officers prior to 1957. It also made a number of recommendations to improve the system, including:

1. Juvenile probation departments should offer an intensive and highly skilled service in delinquency and aggravated, persistent child neglect cases.
2. When neglect is a greater factor than delinquency, services should be provided by a public welfare agency.
3. Mature, skilled caseworkers should provide protective services.
4. Salaries should be raised to permit the establishment of minimum educational and experience requirements for probation personnel.
5. Standards should be established for juvenile court facilities and equipment.

**MCCD Members 1956-1966**

Chairman: Byron J. Nichols
Dr. Charles L. Anspach
Alfred B. Connable
Clark L. Brody
Rt. Rev. Richard S. Emerich
Charles Fellrath
Fedele F. Fauri
Dan F. Gerber

Jack Green
Walter F. Gries
Frank Isbey
Lester M. Kirk
John B. Martin, Jr.
Carl M. Saunders
August Scholle

MCCD’s history becomes even richer over the next 50 years. Stay tuned for our next installment with highlights of our next decade, 1966-1976.

**MCCD is planning its 60th Anniversary Gala event for September 2016.**

Date, time, and location TBD
References

3 Id.
4 Id
5 Id.